

Making Public Safety a Priority
Council President Scott Peters, First District
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The recent police compensation study sponsored by Mayor Sanders and Police Chief Lansdowne documented what many of us on the City Council have said for years; San Diego police officers take home less pay each month than their counterparts in other cities.

In the past 18 months, the ranks of the SDPD shrank by more than 100 officers, who were wooed away by better pay and benefits in other cities. While crime rates are down and our neighborhoods remain well-protected, staff shortages in key areas are a strain on the department which must be addressed.

Last year, I joined several of my Council colleagues in calling for raises for San Diego police officers and a comprehensive recruitment and retention program. Mayor Sanders pledged his support for such a plan, which will be included in the budget for fiscal year 2008.

We recently began a conversation at the City Council about our budget priorities for this upcoming year. As the City works to pay down our pension obligation, boost our reserves and address our backlog of deferred maintenance, we must also address the issue of police pay and preserve our core services that only local government can provide, such as public safety. This will require a series of tough choices among services we must provide, those which we would very much like to provide, and those which are unaffordable luxuries at this point in the City's history.

Tough decisions are nothing new for this City Council. For two years, we held off on pay raises for police officers and fire fighters, even after their remarkable performance during the Cedar Fire and in the wake of September 11. In order to maintain balanced budgets we reduced library and pool hours, cut back on park maintenance, and approved the Mayor's re-engineering proposals which eliminate City jobs. None of this has been easy, but these are the kinds of decisions you elected your Council representatives to make.

Under the new form of government approved by voters in 2004, the Mayor prepares a budget which is considered, revised and approved by the City Council. The role of the Council and the public in this process is vital. I want to know what your priorities are. If you had to choose among the services provided by the City: public safety, trash collection, libraries, parks, planning and neighborhood code enforcement; which would you rank as the most important? These are the kinds of questions the Council will address over the next five months. I hope you will participate in this important civic conversation.

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